

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8319

INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

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E.O. 11652: GDS

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TAGS: PFOR, GW

SUBJECT: OSTPOLITIK IN GERMAN POLITICAL PRIORITIES

SUMMARY: OSTPOLITIK HAS DWINDLED IN IMPORTANCE AS THE SCHMIDT GOVERNMENT HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY PREOCCUPIED WITH INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES. NO GERMAN CHANCELLOR CAN IGNORE OSTPOLITIK, BUT SCHMIDT'S FIRST PRIORITY IS MAINTAINING THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE WESTERN WORLD (AND THEREBY THE FRG). THE OVERALL CAST OF POLICY UNDER SCHMIDT HAS BEEN NOTABLY CONSERVATIVE, DESPITE HIS DYNAMIC, ACTIVIST IMAGE, AND IS LIKELY TO REMAIN SO. THE FACT THAT THE SPD/FDP COALITION FACES A BRUISING SERIES OF ELECTIONS OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WILL REINFORCE OTHER TENDENCIES TOWARD RETRENCHMENT AND EVEN A STATIC QUALITY IN SOME POLICY AREAS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE IMPRESSION IS WIDESPREAD, BOTH EAST AND WEST, THAT THE SCHMIDT GOVERNMENT HAS RELEGATED OSTPOLITIK TO A VERY SECONDARY POSITION IN ITS OVERALL VIEW OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THIS COMPLAINT HAS BEEN VOICED FREQUENTLY ON THE EASTERN SIDE SINCE SCHMIDT TOOK OFFICE LAST MAY, AND HAS FOUND RECENT EXPRESSION IN CONNECTION WITH THE CURRENT DIFFICULTIES IN FRG-SOVIET AND FRG-POLISH RELATIONS. IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT OSTPOLITIK IS NOT WHAT IT WAS IN THE BRANDT-BAHR HEY-DAY, BUT IT IS NOT SO MUCH THAT SCHMIDT HAS TURNED HIS BACK ON OSTPOLITIK -- NO GERMAN CHANCELLOR CAN DO THAT -- OR THAT THERE HAS BEEN A RADICAL POLICY REORIENTATION, AS THAT THE TIMES AND THE MEN, BUT MOSTLY THE TIMES, ARE DIFFERENT.

2. OSTPOLITIK IS NOT THE BURNING ISSUE IN GERMAN POLITICAL LIFE IT WAS IN THE PERIOD ATTENDANT ON THE SIGNING OF THE EASTERN TREATIES AND THE SUBSEQUENT PROCESS OF RATIFICATION. THE GREAT DEBATE ENDED FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES WITH BRANDT'S ELECTION VICTORY AT THE END OF 1972. THE DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT IN THAT PROCESS REMAIN AS A MAJOR POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENT. THE SITUATION WHICH THEY CREATED IS ACCEPTED, NOT ONLY BY THE POPULATION AT

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LARGE, BUT ALSO BY THE CDU/CSU OPPOSITION, AS WAS BROUGHT OUT EXPLICITLY IN A RECENT BUNDESTAG DEBATE.

3. PERHAPS EXPECTATIONS ON BOTH SIDES, IN THE FRG AND IN EASTERN EUROPE, RAN TOO HIGH IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONCLUSION OF THE EASTERN TREATIES, INCLUDING THE BASIC TREATY BETWEEN THE FRG AND THE GDR. THIS WAS PROBABLY INEVITABLE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIGHLY

CHARGED DEBATE IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC AND THE INTENSITY OF POLITICAL REACTION ON THE EASTERN SIDE. OSTPOLITIK IN THE INTERIM HAS BEEN SEEN IN THE FRG AS A LARGELY HUMDRUM, FRUSTRATING AFFAIR, OFTEN INVOLVING GERMAN CONCESSIONS ON MONEY QUESTIONS, OR ELSE COMPLICATED LEGAL ISSUES CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF WEST BERLIN IN BONN'S TREATIES AND AGREEMENTS WITH THE EAST. THE IDEALISTIC FLAVOR AND THE ELAN OF OSTPOLITIK HAS ERODED, BUT THAT WOULD PROBABLY HAVE OCCURRED IN ANY CASE, EVEN IF THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE OF CHANCELLORS.

4. THE MEN ARE DIFFERENT TOO, OF COURSE. BRANDT IS GONE FROM THE GOVERNMENT. BAHR, WHILE STILL A MINISTER AND DRAWN ON BY SCHMIDT FOR ADVICE ON EASTERN POLICY MATTERS, HAS LOST THE POWER AND INFLUENCE HE FORMERLY

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ENJOYED. SCHMIDT HAS MOVED TO TIGHTEN THE REINS ON THE DIRECTION OF EASTERN POLICY, PARTICULARLY FRG-GDR RELATIONS. HE HAS BEEN UNHAPPY WITH THE TENDENCY ON THE PART OF INDIVIDUAL MINISTRIES TO GO THEIR OWN WAY. THE TIGHTER CENTRAL DIRECTION IN THE HANDS OF THE CHANCELLERY MAKES GOOD ORGANIZATIONAL SENSE. AT THE SAME TIME, IT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO A CERTAIN STAGNATION OF EASTERN POLICY. THE STEADY IMPETUS FROM THE TOP THAT MARKED OSTPOLITIK UNDER BRANDT AND BAHR IS NO LONGER THERE. SCHMIDT HAS RESPONDED TO A DECLINE IN PUBLIC INTEREST IN OSTPOLITIK AND IN A SENSE HIMSELF CONTRIBUTED TO THAT DECLINE, BUT HE IS TOO PRACTICAL TO IMAGINE THAT OSTPOLITIK CAN BE IGNORED OR LONG NEGLECTED. HE DOES NOT HAVE BRANDT'S EMOTIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE EAST, BUT HE IS MUCH BETTER INFORMED ABOUT THE ECONOMIC REALITIES IN THE FRG'S RELATIONS WITH THE USSR AND EASTERN EUROPE, AND HE WILL BE INTERESTED IN EXPLOITING THE POSSIBILITIES.

5. SCHMIDT'S POLICY PRIORITIES ARE DIFFERENT FROM BRANDT'S, AND OSTPOLITIK HAS BEEN DIRECTLY AFFECTED. AS HE HAS MADE CLEAR FROM WHEN HE FIRST TOOK OFFICE, SCHMIDT'S OVERRIDING CONCERN IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS--OUTSIDE OF PURE SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS--IS THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE WESTERN WORLD. HE HAS DEVOTED A MAJOR PART OF HIS EFFORT AND ENERGY IN OFFICE TO THIS PROBLEM AND THE GERMAN ROLE IN GRAPPLING WITH IT. THE CONTRAST IN THIS RESPECT WITH BRANDT IS STRIKING. SCHMIDT IS CONTENDING WITH ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC, THAT WERE STILL EMERGING IN

BRANDT'S FINAL PERIOD AS CHANCELLOR. THESE PROBLEMS ARE NOW OF OVERRIDING POLITICAL IMPORTANCE IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC. THE ELECTORATE--WHICH WILL BE VOTING IN SIX LAND ELECTIONS THIS YEAR, FROM BERLIN THIS WEEK-END TO BREMEN AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER--IS PREOCCUPIED WITH BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES. OSTPOLITIK HAS BECOME MARGINAL IN TERMS OF POSITIVE POLITICAL IMPACT AND OPPORTUNITY.

6. LOOKING AT GERMAN POLICY OVERALL UNDER SCHMIDT, IT
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IS STRIKING HOW CONSERVATIVE IT HAS BEEN, DESPITE THE DYNAMIC, INNOVATIVE IMAGE THE CHANCELLOR HAS CREATED FOR HIMSELF. THE REASONS ARE NOT HARD TO FIND. THE WEST GERMAN POPULATION AND ITS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP ARE DEEPLY PERTURBED BY WORLDWIDE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE. THE GERMANS, LIKE OTHER PEOPLE, SEE THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE PAST QUARTER CENTURY THAT HAVE GIVEN THEM SECURITY AND PROSPERITY ERODING. THE FRG ECONOMIC POSITION IS STRONG, BUT THE GERMANS ARE AWARE OF THEIR DEPENDENCE ON ARAB OIL AND EXPORTS. THE SCHMIDT GOVERNMENT HAS RESPONDED AND GIVEN EXPRESSION TO THESE CONCERNS. IT IS MISLEADING TO SPEAK IN THIS CONNECTION OF A RESURGENCE OF GERMAN NATIONALISM IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE. SCHMIDT HAS GIVEN EVERY INDICATION OF BEING WILLING AND ABLE TO STAND UP FOR GERMAN INTERESTS, AND THIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY POPULAR IN THE FRG. BUT THE GERMANS CLEARLY DO SO WITHIN THE ESTABLISHED FRAMEWORKS OF THE NATO ALLIANCE AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY. THERE IS NO SERIOUS INCLINATION TO CUT AWAY BASICALLY FROM THESE FRAMEWORKS.

7. THE OVERALL CAST OF POLICY IS DECIDEDLY CONSERVATIVE, IN THE CONSTRUCTIVE SENSE. THE AIM IS TO PRESERVE AND CONSOLIDATE, TO MAINTAIN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ACHIEVEMENTS RATHER THAN STRIKE OUT IN NEW DIRECTIONS. THERE IS A CERTAIN POLICY RETRENCHMENT VISIBLE, WITH NEW EMPHASES IN CERTAIN AREAS. OSTPOLITIK IS THE OBVIOUS EXAMPLE, BUT THERE ARE OTHERS. IN THE MIDDLE EAST, CLEARLY BECAUSE OF OIL, THE GERMANS ARE EMPHASIZING MUCH MORE STRONGLY THAN BEFORE THE NEED FOR A BALANCED FRG POLICY BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE ARABS. THERE IS A SCALING DOWN OF INTEREST IN THE THIRD WORLD WHICH REFLECTS A MORE CAUTIOUS AND LESS OPENHANDED APPROACH. BONN'S OWN RECOGNITION OF THE GDR HAS, OF COURSE, FREED IT FROM THE LONG YEARS OF BLACKMAIL WHICH IT HAD TO ENDURE IN ITS EFFORTS TO PREVENT THIRD WORLD RECOGNITION OF THE GDR. THE GERMANS INCREASINGLY SHARE OUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY

SHOWN BY MANY UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND FEAR A
FURTHER DECLINE IN THE CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF THE UN.

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8. ON BOTH CSCE AND MBFR, THE FRG REMAINS CONCERNED
AND SKEPTICAL. IN THE FACE OF GENERAL UNCERTAINTY,
THE GERMANS INSTINCTIVELY WANT TO HOLD ON TO WHAT THEY

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HAVE AND KNOW, AND DISTRUST INNOVATION. IT IS PERHAPS
WRONG-HEADED OF THEM TO BE THIS WAY. ON MBFR, THE
ANALYSIS PRESENTED IN MBFR VIENNA 55 (NOTAL), IS APT.
THE BENEFITS TO THE GERMANS FROM A SUC-
CESSFUL MBFR OUTCOME ARE REAL, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN
UNABLE TO OVERCOME THE CONVICTION THAT EAST-WEST
ARRANGEMENTS IN THIS FIELD ARE LIKELY TO LEAVE THEM
DISADVANTAGED. THEY ARE AWARE THAT FRG FORCES ARE A
SPECIFIC TARGET FOR THE EAST IN THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS.
THEY ALSO SHOW THE UTMOST SENSITIVITY ON THE POINT THAT
AS A RESULT OF MBFR ARRANGEMENTS THE FRG WOULD BECOME
THE SUBJECT OF SOME KIND OF SPECIAL REGIME. THE GER-
MANS FEEL THEY ARE NOW EMERGING FROM THEIR SPECIAL
STATUS IN THE AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR II, AND DO NOT
WANT TO TURN BACK. THEY FEEL ON MBFR, AS ON OTHER
MATTERS, THAT US MARGINS ARE IMMEASURABLY WIDER THAN
THEIRS, AND THE STAKES ARE HIGHER FOR THEM THAN FOR
THEIR EUROPEAN ALLIES. GERMANY IS WHERE IT ALL HAPPENS,
AND THEY ARE THE ONES MOST, AND MOST DIRECTLY, AFFECTED.
WE DO NOT SEE MUCH LIKELIHOOD OF CHANGE IN THIS ATT-
TITUDE IN THE TIME AHEAD. THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT
COALITION NOW FACES A WEARING ELECTION GRIND ARGUES FOR
CONTINUATION OF CONSERVATIVE, RATHER STATIC POLICY
APPROACHES.

9. THE CONCLUSIONS FOR US-GERMAN RELATIONS FROM THE
ABOVE ARE NEITHER NEW NOR STRIKING. THE FAMILIAR
GERMAN SENSITIVITIES WHICH HAVE TAKEN UP US TIME AND
ATTENTION IN THE PAST REMAIN, AND INDEED THEY MAY BE
SAID TO BE MORE TO THE FORE THAN EVER. THIS MAY SEEM
PARADOXICAL BECAUSE OF THE ENORMOUS ACCRETION IN GERMAN
POLITICAL, MILITARY AND ECONOMIC STRENGTH IN RECENT
YEARS, BUT THE GERMANS ARE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE PRE-

VAILING UNCERTAINTIES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. THEY
WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK TO THE US FOR THE ESSENTIAL RE-
ASSURANCES THAT ONLY WE CAN PROVIDE. THIS
SITUATION CLEARLY PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR A CONTINUING
HIGH LEVEL OF EXTREMELY POSITIVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE
TWO COUNTRIES.

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